

2. NILGIRI TAHR (*HEMITRAGUS HYLOCRIUS*) 'SADDLE BACKS'

I wish to make the following comment on Dr. George Schaller's excellent report on the Nilgiri Tahr which appeared in the December 1970 issue of the *Journal* [Vol. 67 (3) : 365-389].

Dr. Schaller estimates the saddleback population in the Nilgiris at 9.1%, which to my reckoning is on the high side. In the census I conducted in the Nilgiris in 1963, no attempt was made to classify the population according to age and sex. However, the Nilgiri Wild Life Association being primarily interested in sport, we did make a mental note of the 'Saddle backs' (which alone are allowed to be shot on licence) seen. There were less than 10 out of the 292 tahr seen—if my memory serves me right—8.

In all my several trips to the tahr country spread over the last 17 years (the first 7 with the rifle, when incidentally, I failed to bag any) I came across less than a score of saddle backs.

On a trip to the Grass Hills last April, among the 140 tahr I saw, there was only one saddle back. It is the universal complaint of sportsmen that saddle backs are difficult to come by. Shikar books prove it.

My estimate is that not more than 3 or 4% of the tahr in the Nilgiris are saddle backs.

I have discussed Dr. Schaller's figure with knowledgeable and observant sportsmen and professional shikaries and their estimate is 2 to 3%. As regards the High Range tahr Mr. J. C. Gouldsbury writes : 'I was also surprised at George Schaller's figures of saddle backs on the Eravikulam and questioned him about it at the time, but I know that he did a very careful count and it is difficult to believe that he could have been far out.'

Dr. Schaller with whom I raised this point has replied : 'That your figures with respect to the number of saddle backs do not agree with one is not surprising. It is easy to find a big herd or two of females and young yet not a single saddle back. These males tend to congregate, often far away from the female-young herds. As I indicated in my article, in the Eravikulam, 30 out of 69 large males were in one corner of the reserve. Had I missed that corner in my census, my tally for saddle backs would have been much, much lower. Similarly, in the Bangitappal-Sispara area I found very few males—until I climbed to the highest hill in the southern part and there were several male herds, raising my tally considerably. So unless one censuses a whole region, samples can be misleading. The best time of the year in which to conduct a census would be during the rut when the males are with the females. I hope you will be able to do such a census and it would be most valuable to publish your results of censuses in the same area at different times of

the year. This would give a good check on whether or not our figures are biased.'

I agree with Dr. Schaller's observations, but dispute his assumption that my low figure is due to certain areas having been left out of the reckoning. Some of us locals know the area quite intimately and my statement is based on observations made, over a period of time.

To get a tahr shot under licence passed as a saddle back exacting standards are employed. Having been used to such standards we tend to become cautious in the choice of our saddle backs. In defence of Dr. Schaller it must be said that not being used to these standards he has erred on the liberal side.

Several questions arise and for which answers are wanting.

When the percentage of young bucks is fairly high why should the saddle back population be so low? Whether the saddle mark vanishes and reappears depending upon the age of the tahr and season? Whether the saddle mark appears at a very late age? Whether some male tahr do not develop the saddle at all?

It has been observed in the Nilgiris that during certain years there is a much higher percentage of saddle backs (but never as high as even 5%) than during others. It is not always that a saddle back carries a longer pair of horns than a brown buck. Do these provide a key to some of the answers?

'CANOWIE',
COONOR-1,
NILGIRIS,
July 2, 1971.

E. R. C. DAVIDAR

3. BIRTH OF AN INDIAN PANGOLIN (*MANIS CRASSICAUDATA*) IN CAPTIVITY

A pregnant female of the Indian Pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*) with the Nandankanan Biological Park (Orissa) since 26.x.1971, gave birth to a male young on 17.xi.1971. The new-born young measured 30 cm from tip to tip including a 12.5 cm long tail and weighed 235 gm. The eyes were open at birth and the young was able to crawl over the mother's body soon after birth. The new-born young had soft scales and coarse grey hairs were present on the under-surface of almost all the scales throughout the body and projecting beyond the scales. After delivery the mother weighed 10.6 kg. The mother along with the young curled up keeping the young under the ventral part of her body and made a hissing sound as a sign of annoyance when disturbed. The young when